



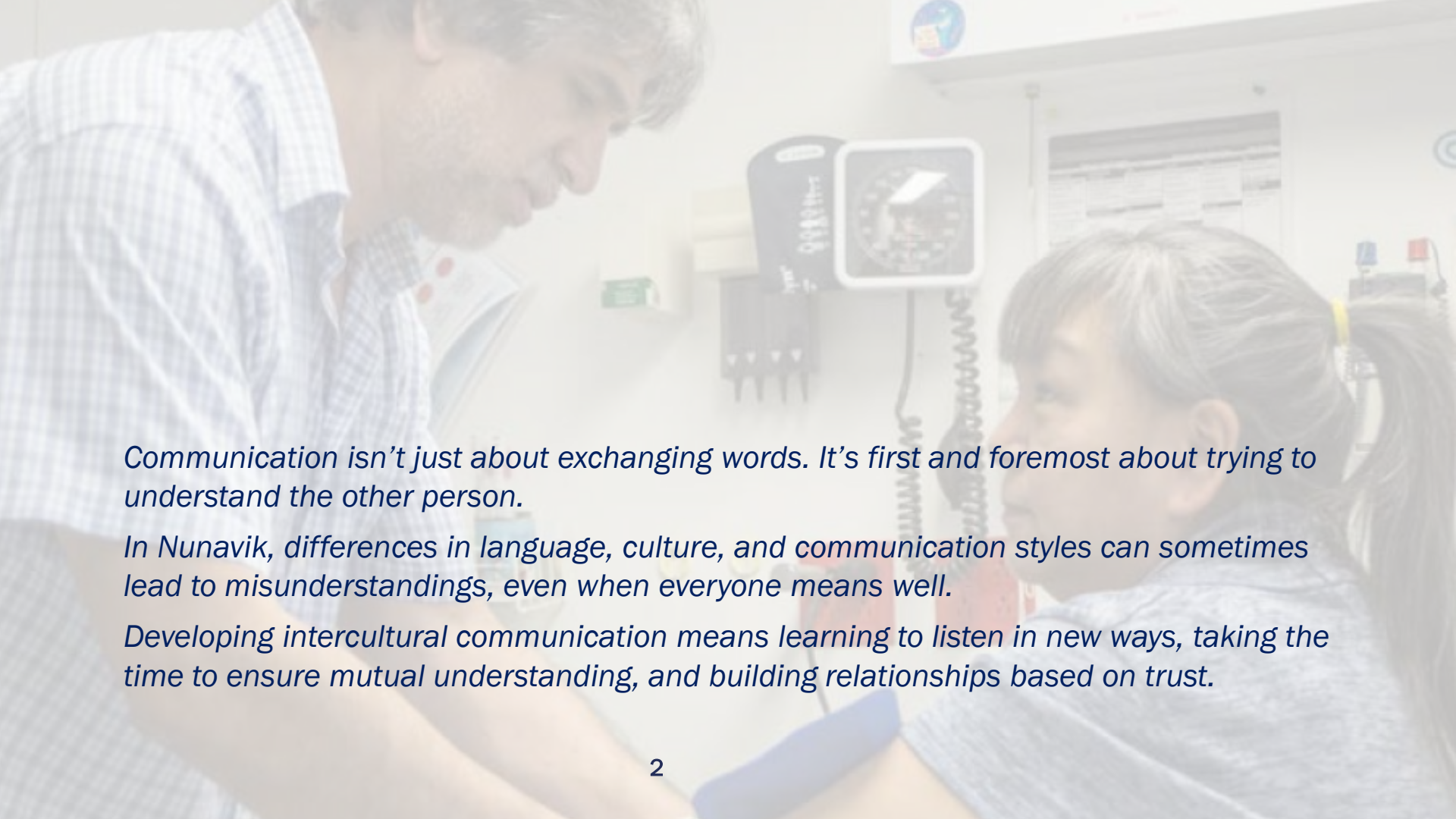
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UNGAVA TULATTAVIK HEALTH CENTER
CENTRE DE SANTÉ TULATTAVIK DE L'UNGAVA

FACT SHEET 7 – LANGUAGE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Understanding One Another to Build Stronger Relationships

Cultural Safety Team
Reference Guide on Nunavik and Cultural Safety
Sheet 7 of 16





Communication isn't just about exchanging words. It's first and foremost about trying to understand the other person.

In Nunavik, differences in language, culture, and communication styles can sometimes lead to misunderstandings, even when everyone means well.

Developing intercultural communication means learning to listen in new ways, taking the time to ensure mutual understanding, and building relationships based on trust.



WHY THIS TOPIC IS IMPORTANT AT UTHC

Communication is at the heart of every interaction between employees, service users, and their loved ones. In Nunavik, these exchanges often take place between people who do not share the same native language, cultural references, or communication style.

Inuktitut is the native language of the vast majority of Nunavimmiut. Although many also speak French or English, receiving important information in one's own language remains essential for understanding care, asking questions, and participating in decisions.



Photo: NRBHSS – 2017 : QANUILIRPITAA?

Effective communication does not depend solely on words. Active listening, taking the time for conversations, using interpreters, and respecting different communication styles all contribute to creating a genuine atmosphere of trust.

At the UTHC, effective communication is therefore an essential component of quality of care, patient safety, and cultural safety.

IN PERSPECTIVE

Understanding Before Being Understood

Effective communication is not just about conveying information. It's also about ensuring that the person feels heard, respected, and truly understood. Every interaction is an opportunity to build trust,



COMMUNICATING BEYOND WORDS

Communication isn't just about words. The tone of voice, pauses, facial expressions, the rhythm of the conversation, and the way questions are asked also convey important information.

Depending on the people involved and the context, silence does not necessarily mean refusal, misunderstanding, or a lack of interest. It may reflect a moment of reflection, respect, or simply the need to take time before responding.

Intercultural communication therefore requires paying attention to what is said as well as what is left unsaid. Observing, listening, and checking your understanding are often just as important as speaking.

Someone may fully understand without responding immediately.. A quick response isn't always the best indicator of effective communication.



Photo Ansgar Walk – Maktaaq 2

GOOD TO KNOW – Silence Can Also Communicate

In many cultures, including Inuit culture, silences can have a positive value. They allow people to reflect, show respect, or give everyone time to express themselves.

Before jumping to a conclusion, it's often best to take the time to observe, listen, and confirm your understanding.



THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF INTERPRETERS

Interpreters play an essential role in the care provided in Nunavik. They facilitate communication between patients and healthcare professionals and contribute to a better understanding of each person's linguistic and cultural realities.

Even when an interpreter is present, the relationship remains, first and foremost, between the healthcare professional and the person receiving care. Look at the person, speak to them directly, and Taking the time to allow for interpretation fosters more respectful communication.

Interpretation is not just about translating words. It also helps to better understand the meaning of a message, the concerns being expressed, and the context in which they arise.

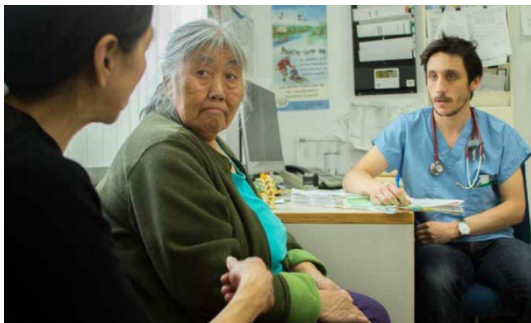


Photo UTHC – During the broadcast "De garde 24/7"

Interpreters are essential members of the care team. Their expertise contributes to more accurate, respectful, and safe communication.

GOOD TO KNOW – Working Successfully with an Interpreter

A few simple steps can improve the quality of communication:

- ✓ Introduce yourself and explain your role.
- ✓ Address the person directly, not the interpreter.
- ✓ Use short sentences and allow enough time for interpretation.
- ✓ Check regularly to make sure the message has been understood.
- ✓ Avoid acronyms, jargon, or expressions that are difficult to translate.



LISTENING: THE FIRST COMMUNICATION TOOL

Effective communication begins with attentive listening. Taking the time to observe, letting the person finish their thought, and confirming your understanding fosters a relationship of trust.

Everyone communicates in their own way. Some people easily express their emotions or concerns, while others take more time or prefer to give shorter answers. These differences do not necessarily reflect a lack of interest or cooperation.

Adopting an open attitude, respecting the pace of the conversation, and avoiding hasty conclusions allow you to better understand the person and provide care that is better suited to their reality.



Photo UTHC – Kangiqsualujuaq

GOOD TO KNOW – Active listening makes all the difference

Active listening involves, among other things:

- ✓ giving the person your full attention;
- ✓ allowing time for the other person to respond, without interrupting;
- ✓ observing nonverbal cues;
- ✓ rephrasing or checking your understanding when necessary;
- ✓ being comfortable with moments of silence.

When a person feels truly heard, they feel more confident about asking questions, expressing their concerns, and participating in decisions regarding their care.



TRUST IS BUILT FROM THE VERY FIRST MEETING

The first few minutes of an encounter often influence the quality of the relationship that follows. Introducing yourself, explaining your role, and taking the time to establish initial contact help the other person better understand what's happening and feel more confident.

Respectful communication isn't based solely on the information shared. It's also built through an open attitude, attentive listening, and respecting the other person's pace.

Even when time is limited, a few simple gestures can make a significant difference in the care experience and in the person's sense of being treated with respect.

A simple gesture like introducing yourself and offering a handshake, when appropriate, can help create an atmosphere of trust from the very beginning. In Nunavik, a gesture as simple as a handshake can be a sign of respect and a first step toward a trusting relationship.

GOOD TO KNOW – Small Gestures That Make a Big Difference

Before beginning care, take a few moments to:

- ✓ introduce yourself and explain your role;
- ✓ make sure the person understands why you're there;
- ✓ ask if they have any questions or concerns;
- ✓ allow enough time to answer them;
- ✓ thank the person for their cooperation.

These simple steps foster a relationship based on respect, trust, and partnership.



FAMILY AND LOVED ONES: ESSENTIAL PARTNERS IN CARE

For many people in Nunavik, family and loved ones play an important role in the care journey. Their presence can help the person understand information, provide reassuring support, and contribute to understanding, support, and—when the person wishes—decision-making.

Each person is free to choose who they want to involve in their care. It is therefore important to avoid making assumptions and to ask who they would like to have by their side, as well as what role they would like those people to play.

Taking the time to include loved ones, when the person wishes, support more effective communication and strengthens the relationship of trust.



Photo courtesy of the UTHC, “Become a Foster Family” campaign

GOOD TO KNOW – Communication isn’t always a two-way street

Depending on the person’s wishes, it may be helpful to:

- ✓ ask the person who they would like to have by their side;
- ✓ take the time to explain important information to everyone involved;
- ✓ recognize the role of loved ones in providing daily support;
- ✓ adapt your communication to reflect the person’s expressed wishes.

The best way to find out who is important to a person is simply to ask them.



IN MY WORK AT THE UTHC

Understanding the importance of language and intercultural communication reminds me that effective communication is not just about conveying information. It's also about creating the conditions that allow people to understand, ask questions, and participate in decisions that affect them.

Every encounter is unique. Some people will want to talk more, while others will prefer to take their time, be accompanied by a loved one, or communicate with the help of an interpreter. My role is to adapt to their needs without making assumptions.

This understanding can help me:

- **take the time to listen** before trying to respond;
- **use interpreters as true communication partners**;
- **verify my understanding**, as well as the person's;
- **adapt my communication** to the pace, needs, and preferences expressed;
- **create a relationship of trust** where the person feels respected, listened to, and fully involved in their care.

THE ESSENTIALS

Respectful communication depends on more than just words. It is based on listening, openness, adaptability, and partnership. Every interaction is an opportunity to build trust.



A FEW WORDS IN INUKTITUT

ᐅᐱᓂᓐ – Tusarniq

Listen • Pay attention

Listening means valuing what the other person is expressing—not only through their words, but also through their silences, emotions, and nonverbal cues.

ᐅᐱᓕᓴᓐ – Uqalimaarniq

Communicate • Exchange

Communicating means sharing ideas, asking questions, explaining, and seeking mutual understanding.

ᐅᐱᓂᓐ – Tukisiniq

Understanding • Understanding

Understanding is not just about hearing words. It's also about grasping the meaning of the message, the context, and the person's reality.

DID YOU KNOW

In Inuktitut, many words describe an action or a way of being rather than a simple object. This richness of the language reflects a way of seeing the world in which relationships, context, and experiences play an important role.



DID YOU KNOW THAT...?

..... Inuktitut is the native language of the vast majority of Nunavimmiut?

For many people, receiving important information in their own language makes it easier to understand, reduces stress, and encourages more active participation in decisions about their care.

..... effective communication depends on more than just the spoken language?

The tone of voice, pauses, gestures, eye contact, and the time spent with the person also influence the quality of the relationship and mutual understanding.

..... interpreters play an essential role in the quality and safety of care in Nunavik?

They facilitate communication between patients and healthcare professionals while helping to convey the meaning of the conversation with respect for each person's language and culture.

..... taking a few minutes to establish initial contact can make all the difference?

Introducing yourself, explaining your role, greeting the person, and taking the time to listen build trust and contribute to a more positive care experience.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Effective communication is more than just speaking the same language. Listening, observing, and checking for understanding are just as important.
- ✓ Respectful communication builds trust. Taking the time to introduce yourself, explain your role, and listen to the other person helps build a strong relationship.
- ✓ Interpreters are essential partners. They facilitate mutual understanding and contribute to safer, more respectful care.
- ✓ Everyone communicates in their own way. Avoiding assumptions and adapting to the needs, pace, and preferences expressed by the person leads to a better care experience.
- ✓ High-quality intercultural communication is an essential element of cultural safety. Every interaction is an opportunity to build trust.

IN PERSPECTIVE

Effective communication is not just about conveying information. It's also about creating a space where the person feels heard, understood, respected, and fully involved in their care.



REFLECTING ON MY PRACTICE

1. Do I take the time to make sure the person has fully understood the information I'm sharing, rather than assuming the message is clear?
2. How can I adapt my communication style when the person is speaking another language, using an interpreter, or taking more time to respond?
3. Do I place as much importance on listening, pauses, and nonverbal cues as I do on the words exchanged?
4. What small gestures can I make in the first few minutes of a meeting to foster a climate of trust?



UTHC RECOMMENDS

Let us tell you

[HERE on Tou.tv](#)

This documentary series highlights the richness of oral tradition, Indigenous languages, and stories passed down from generation to generation. Through the testimonies and stories shared by First Nations peoples, it reminds us that communication is not just about conveying information, but also about listening, understanding, and creating a space where everyone can share their experiences.

Northerned episode 12

<https://youtu.be/HgL2nWGn-vQ?si=YZz7NVQi8bfPsIDi>

Why we recommend it?

Because quality communication begins with listening. This series invites us to discover the importance of speech, storytelling, and knowledge transmission in Indigenous cultures, while reminding us that every exchange is an opportunity to build a relationship based on respect, trust, and mutual understanding.



TO GO FURTHER



The Encounter – Lucie Lachapelle ([National Film Board of Canada](#))

This documentary follows couples made up of non-Indigenous and Indigenous people, including Inuit, and sensitively explores the challenges, discoveries, and lessons that come with the meeting of two cultures. Through their stories, it reminds us that communication is based above all on listening, respect, and the willingness to understand one another.



The Call of the North ([Radio-Canada OHdio](#))

This audio series gives a voice to the people of the North and addresses themes such as language, identity, the transmission of knowledge, and the contemporary realities of Inuit communities. It offers a wonderful opportunity to hear the voices of the North and gain a better understanding of their daily lives.



Guidance Sheet on Communicating with First Nations and Inuit ([Government of Quebec](#))

This practical guide offers concrete advice on communicating respectfully, building trusting relationships, and better understanding certain cultural realities that may influence interactions in a healthcare setting.



Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: What the Inuit Have Always Known ([University of Quebec Press](#))

Through the words and testimonies of Inuit Elders, this book presents the knowledge, values, and principles that guide community life. An enriching read for gaining a better understanding of the Inuit worldview and the importance of passing on knowledge.

**Every encounter is an opportunity to listen,
understand... and build a relationship of trust.**

